

Testimony before the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

RE: HB 5300 ANACT REQUIRING LEGISLATIVE APPROVAL FOR THE MERGER
OR CLOSING OF INSTITUTIONS WITHIN THE CONNECTICUT STATE
COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES AND PROHIBITING THE CONSOLIDATION OF
THE REGIONAL COMMUNITY-TECHNICAL COLLEGES.

Submitted by Patrick Sullivan, English Department, Manchester Community College

Dear Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee:

I am in full support of House Bill 5300.

Thank you for bringing this important legislation forward.

I support this bill for many reasons. But perhaps most emphatically I am in support of this bill because there is evidence emerging that suggests that “[racialized austerity](#)” measures are being used to “save money” in some state higher education systems.

It appears this may be an essential part of how Connecticut’s proposed community college consolidation plan has been designed.

One way that racialized austerity is implemented is that students on predominantly white campuses have a greater chance [to study with full-time professors](#) than those who attend minority-serving institutions (see also [Espinosa et al.](#); [Taylor et al.](#)).

It appears that the system office and the BOR have embraced this model, and the numbers bear this out.

Let’s start with University of Connecticut, where [UConn student demographics](#) show that Hispanic/Latino students (10%) and Black students (6%) together comprise 16% of the overall student population.

At the University of Connecticut, College Factual reports that “only **33.0%** of the teaching staff are part-time non-faculty or non-tenure track faculty. This use of adjuncts is low, **below the national average of 51.4%**, which could be indicative of University of Connecticut’s commitment to building [a strong, long-term instructional team](#).”

Moving to Eastern Connecticut State University, [ECSU student demographics](#) show Hispanic/Latino students (12%) and Black students (10%) together comprise 22% of the overall student population.

At Eastern Connecticut State University, College Factual reports that “**59.0%** of the teaching staff at Eastern Connecticut State University are part-time non-faculty or non-tenure track faculty. This use of adjuncts is [on par with the national average of 51.4%.](#)”

Finally, at Manchester Community College, my home institution, [MCC student demographics](#) show Hispanic/Latino students (22%) and Black students (19%) together comprise 41% of the overall student population.

At Manchester Community College, College Factual reports that [78% of the teaching faculty are part-time.](#)

What we see from UConn, ECSU and MCC is that as our Hispanic/Latino and Black student population increases from 16% to 22% to 41%, the utilization of part-time, non-tenure track faculty similarly increases from 33% to 59% to 78%.

This is not by accident or coincidence. Our community college system enrolls the most diverse student population across higher education in our state. Diversity data from [across the community college system](#) (for 2019, pre-pandemic) shows Hispanic/Latino students (28%) and Black students (18%) comprise 46% of the community college student population.

The Congress of CT Community Colleges (4Cs) – one of the faculty unions representing community college faculty – reports 75% of active teaching faculty across our twelve community colleges are adjunct faculty.

Other colleges across the system report part-time faculty numbers similar to MCC’s:

[Norwalk](#) Community College: 76% part-time

[Housatonic](#) Community College: 78% part-time

[Gateway](#) Community College: 81% part-time

[Capital](#) Community College: 69% part-time

[Naugatuck Valley](#) Community College: 81% part-time

[Middlesex](#) Community College: 74% part-time

[Three Rivers](#) Community College: 75% part-time

Education scholars [Adrianna Kezar and Daniel Maxey](#) summarize what this means for students:

Changes in the composition of the American professoriate toward a mostly contingent workforce are raising important questions about the nature of non-tenure-track faculty work and connections between their working conditions and student learning outcomes. Non-tenure-track faculty, particularly part-time faculty members, face a number of challenges and obstacles in the workplace that constrain their abilities to provide a high quality educational experience and facilitate optimal student learning. Recent research suggests the rising numbers of part-time faculty, their working conditions, and the lack of support they receive from their institutions are having an adverse impact on various measures of student success. Examples include diminished graduation and retention rates, decreased likelihood of transfer from two- to four-year institutions, lower grade point averages, and greater difficulty with major selection and persistence; these outcomes were often disproportionately experienced by students who were beginning their postsecondary education, including those in developmental or remedial courses.

Furthermore, Kezar and Maxey note, “although interactions and relationships with faculty members are strong predictors of learning among nearly all groups of students, they have been found to be strongest for students of color.”

Other bad news for Connecticut community college students include the following:

- The BOR has just approved another 5% tuition increase. At a recent meeting to discuss this matter, Regent Jimenez from the BOR [asked](#) (19:15+), “Is our [tuition] increase too modest?”
- Staff that work directly with students in IT, financial aid, and other areas are being laid off or their positions are being eliminated.
- More highly paid administrators—who do not work directly with students—continue to be hired. The current organizational chart now runs to more than 80 pages—all administrators. It should be 80 pages of new faculty.
- The system office is building a disposable faculty and staff workforce for community colleges, who will have as little job security, status, and intellectual freedom as collective bargaining will allow.
- While the system office imposes austerity measures on community colleges along with a hiring freeze, its own budget has ballooned from \$30.3 million in 2017 to \$69.1 million today. That increase is more than the total \$24 million the Students First initiative *was originally designed to save* when this consolidation plan was first announced in 2017. This money should have been spent to hire faculty and staff who work directly with students.
- Representative Gregory Haddad [said this](#) about “Students First” in March last year (2021) at a Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee meeting:

“In the four years I was chair of this committee, I’ve heard Students First spoken of positively about only in these presentations by your administration. I think I took one single meeting with two professors who came in to talk with me positively about this proposal. I’ve been contacted literally by hundreds of professors through the system who work at community colleges and elsewhere in your system in opposition to this change.”

- A recent article in [Inside Higher Ed](#) reported that the Covid pandemic has made the financial conditions for adjunct faculty even more precarious. Legislators, please note the title of this article, “From Bad to Worse,” and this key take-away:

“adjunct academic work was precarious even before the pandemic, and the coronavirus made ‘a grave situation even worse.’”

Furthermore, please note: “just 20 percent [of adjunct faculty surveyed] said they could comfortably cover basic monthly expenses.”

Here’s a question I would like all Connecticut residents to consider: Don’t community college students also deserve a strong, long-term, non-poverty-level instructional team?

The state legislature needs to be a part of this conversation. It needs to provide structured, legislatively-mandated oversight for the system office and the BOR.

Too much is at stake to leave oversight to the BOR—a body made up entirely of political appointees which has shown itself to be a political action committee that provides unconditional support for the system office and rubber stamp approval for all system office initiatives.

This leadership model is failing the state and its citizens.

Our great community college students deserve better.

It is time for the legislature to intervene in this ill-advised consolidation plan and begin providing oversight in support of thousands of community college students statewide.

I submit these comments respectfully and urge you to pass House Bill 5300.